# Mobility along Socio-cultural Borders: Brisk-walking in Bedouin Towns

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*Substantial changes in contemporary Bedouin society are reflected in the rise of 'affluence morbidities' which suggest that there is an increasing need to engage in physical activity. Brisk-walking, recently practiced by several dozen residents in the Bedouin towns of Hura and Tel-Sheva reflects the adoption of a new life-style that has generated tension when practiced in the public sphere. Based on the qualitative methodology of in-depth interviews and walking participation events, this paper presents both the pioneering brisk-walker's experience and the tensions that have arisen between this activity and the cultural, behavioral and performance constraints that shape Bedouin current urbanity. Taking a space and place approach, the 'legitimate spaces' of brisk-walking are outlined vis-a-vis gender, tribal affiliation, inter-group relationships and the meanings of the preferred type of space for brisk-walking – within the town, in its outlying spaces or in the neighboring Jewish suburbs. In understanding leisure walking spaces as a field of socio-cultural and spatial negotiation within the context of mobile/immobile spaces, the manner in which this unique and complex mobility experience affects walker's sense of place is interpreted.*

***Keywords:*** *Bedouin, brisk-walking, socio-cultural borders, urbanity, constructing mobile third-place, borrowing space.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Israeli Bedouin have only recently joined the urban realm as a result of forced settlement and uprooting by the state. They are now subject to urbanized consumerism along with its effects and mental and physical implications. One of the key tools in coping with these negative aspects of urbanity and consumerism is leisure-time physical activity (LPA) which in the present global urban age has become a universal vital need. On the face of it, LPA is a ubiquitously available social resource. However, it seems that awareness of its importance, accessibility to proper physical infrastructure, and particularly socio-cultural capacity are not equal. Among socio-

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ethnically disadvantaged groups such as the Bedouin, this capacity may be considerably lower.

This article focuses on LPA brisk-walking as a form of mobility practiced by Israeli Bedouin residents of the Bedouin towns of Hura and Tel-Sheva in metropolitan Beer Sheva. We will review critically some of the constraints such as social boundaries, cultural obstacles and poor physical infrastructure in their towns, along with their spatial creativity in finding pathways to implement this novel leisure physical activity despite these constraints. Relying on qualitative research tools which involved also participant observation at the individual practitioner level, there is an analysis of contemporary nature and boundaries of social legitimacy of brisk-walking in the Bedouin semi-urban space as a possible indicator in understanding the unique contemporary nature of Bedouin urbanity.

## RETURNING TO WALKING – A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The interest in walking reflects an understanding of its growing significance worldwide. In various fields such as ecology, urban planning and architecture and public health, researchers have been positioning walking at the heart of their research interests, describing its various benefits for both humans and cities and encouraging its increased practice. The interest in urban performance has recently led Karrholm et. al. (2017) in an attempt to develop a meta-language for urban walking by taking a relational approach. One of the terms they propose is 'walking assemblage', that is the relationships between different sorts of urban walking. This paper focuses on a single sort of walking, brisk walking, and highlights two dimensions of this form of mobility: first, it examines the background, the main trends and processes of 'brisk-walking' as a growing leisure time practice of physical exercise, and second, it situates walking within the context of inter-group power relations by analyzing its socio-cultural meaning in a culture where mobility in the public sphere is severely constrained socially and spatially.

### *Walking as LPA – A global overview*

It is widely accepted that the 'disease of affluence' has become widespread as a result of urbanization and economic growth (Janssen et al., 2005; Novotny, 2005; Galal, 2003). However, at the top of the global income pyramid, rates of some risk factors of morbidity stabilize and even decline (Ezzati et al., 2005). This shift can be partially explained by a higher awareness of the importance of physical exercise and higher participation rates in LPA by more privileged social groups, notably the Western white urban population (Parks et al., 2003; Craig et al., 2004). It is also generally accepted that sustained and consistent exercise of LPA has proven beneficial for the prevention of various diseases or their therapy, prolonging life ex-

pectancy and improving some components of mental well-being (Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Abbott et al, 2004).

Nevertheless, similar to any other social good, these benefits are not evenly distributed. Studies show that differences in social power and culture play important roles in affecting LPA (Wardle & Steptoe, 2003). In developed countries, rates of physical activity associated with daily work are declining but physical activity associated with leisure is increasing. In contrast, societies at earlier stages of urbanization and development are particularly vulnerable due to reduced work-related physical activity without yet becoming accustomed to LPA habits and lifestyle (Moore et al, 2010; Reichert et al., 2007; Ellis et al., 2007; Wardle and Steptoe, 2003; Sallis et al., 1999). A reflection of social power associated with LPA is manifested also at the regional and urban scales, where local minorities and other relatively marginalized groups tend to exercise LPA less compared to stronger neighboring socio-cultural groups (Parks et al., 2003; Marshall et al., 2007).

Outdoor brisk-walking is considered an effective LPA for reducing health-risk factors (Murphy et al., 2002; Tully et al., 2005) and perhaps the easiest exercise to perform. As a social practice requiring minor expenditure and only a personal decision, brisk-walking is apparently a highly accessible social resource for all social groups. However, cultural and ethnicity factors add considerable complexity. It is for this reason that some observers attempt to place brisk-walking by vulnerable and marginalized social groups at the forefront of the social study of LPA (Brownson et al., 2000; Berrigan & Troiano, 2002; Owen et al., 2004).

### *The cultural meanings of walking*

It is generally assumed that the practice of brisk-walking has cultural and social dimensions, yet the explicit focus in the literature on the cultural aspects of walking, let alone brisk-walking, is quite limited. Only a handful studies have dealt with the multiplicity of cultural meanings of walking. Walking has been discussed in relation to creative activity and art creation, political protest and military performances (Amato, 2004; Jarvis, 1997; Wallace, 1993); and it is typically regarded as a bodily performance embedded in social, cultural and political conditions. As suggested by Ingold (2004), walking is a profoundly social activity embedded in one's life-journey. At the same time, it constitutes a unique social existence that, according to the phenomenologist's understanding of the human condition as rich, holistic, interactive and reflective (Pink, 2008; Heidegger, 1988) is considered a highly vulnerable mode of being-in-the-world.

Whether ordinary functional walking (such as to work) or intentional and routine brisk-walking, the decision to walk outdoors means choosing a less private and less protected spatial experience than staying at home or driving a vehicle. Consequently, outdoor walking is engaged with a rich array of emotions connected to the physical and social qualities of the environment, such as weather, various level of risk or safety, exclusivity or inclusivity, the sense of home or alienation, to name

but a few (Edensor, 2000; Waitt et al., 2009). It also involves vision and visibility, or more precisely vision in motion, as part of the comprehensive sensorialized social experience: the various vistas encountered "exceed territorial fixations...(producing) social territories through subsequent chains of deterritorializations and reterritorializations of the urban environment" (Brighenti, 2010, 130-1). Therefore, walking may generate a distinct interaction with the environment, or the public sphere, creating a unique experience of the self and place compared to other social modes of action and mobility such as vehicular commuting (Ingold, 2004).

In light of these qualities, it seems clear that the practice of walking has cultural and spatial meaning. Anthropological studies of non-Western walking reveal that it interweaves with processes of knowledge production and with transferring geographical and cultural wisdom both by direct experience and by story-telling (Tuckpo, 2008; Basso, 1996). Furthermore, outdoor walking is capable of constructing social cohesion and cultural continuity as well as a sense of surprise, change and revivification, which are integral to other forms of out-of-home journeys (Casey, 1993; Cuba & Hummon, 1993). These qualities suggest that walking is a dialogical practice (Lee and Ingold, 2006) and that walking routes can be understood a series of dialogical spaces: inter-personal in cases of transferring cultural knowledge (Legat, 2008; Carabelli, 2014), human-animal in cases of transhumance and hunters-gatherers' experience (Gooch, 2008), and human-environment in many other cases (Rodaway, 1994; Birkeland, 2005; Wylie, 2005).

These insights suggest that outdoor walking may influence processes of constructing place which is humankind's ongoing construction of spatial meaning. Recently framed under the 'new mobility paradigm' (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Sheller, 2014) it is now well-established in the literature that people tend to load spaces and places with meaning not just as a reflection of their stationarity, but rather also with regard to their mobility (Cresswell, 1996; Manzo, 2005). Indeed, development of relationships between walking and place-construction were found in studies of pilgrimage, travel and tourism (Birkeland, 2005; Bouman, 1996). Furthermore, greater attention has been given recently to everyday walking within residential spaces as a crucial generator of the sense of place (Degen, 2010; Dobson, 2011; Ramsden, 2017). However, the specific role of LPA and especially brisk-walking in the construction of place has not yet been sufficiently addressed. The interrelated social, cultural and spatial dimensions of brisk-walking among the Bedouin are the focus of this research.

## BEDOUIN BRISK-WALKING IN THE ISRAELI CONTEXT

The profile of Israeli LPA follows the socio-spatial dimensions outlined above. Results of a recent multi-year survey conducted by the Israeli Popular Sport Association among the Jewish Hebrew-speaking population in Israel demonstrate a

steady and significant increase in the recent decade in number of individuals exercising LPA (Igud HaSport HaAmami, 2016). Since the mid-1990s, the most popular physical exercise, practiced regularly by more than two-thirds of adults, is a twice-weekly 30-minute walk. The data indicate that slightly more women than men walk, and that the average age of brisk-walkers is older compared to other LPA fields.

However, culture, class and ethnicity create wide social margins of sub-activity in Israel. For example, ultra-orthodox Jews are significantly less active in LPA[1] (Paz & Almog, 2009). The Arab citizens of Israel, in accordance with their low social status as an ethnic-religious-national minority display similar patterns. Their rate of LPA activity is considered significantly lower than in the general population (Mabat, 2003; Daoud, 2007). The Bedouin, who mainly inhabit the southern semi-desert Negev region, are more rural, conservative and socio-economically marginalized. The LPA profile of the Bedouin has not yet been studied quantitatively. Educational and public health officials in Bedouin towns report, on the basis of personal knowledge, that the Bedouin are less LPA active than the northern Arabs, and that adult LPA activity is a novel trend emerging only in the last decade. This new performance is part of wider cultural changes which the Bedouin have been undergoing during the last decades.

### *The Negev Bedouin - Socio-spatial and cultural transformations*

The Negev Bedouin number about 250,000 (CBS, 2017); close to half are descendants of semi-nomadic pastoral- tribes who inhabited vast areas of the Negev desert for several centuries. The rest are primarily descendants of Egyptian peasants who immigrated to Palestine during the nineteenth century and were annexed to the Bedouin tribes. In the late nineteenth century the Bedouin began to abandon their pastoral and dry-farming subsistence and semi-nomadic lifestyle and settle in more permanent villages. This process marked the beginning of a profound cultural change that is increasingly becoming more intensified (Meir, 1997; Ben David, 2004 ).

The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 marked a critical turning point in the modern history of the Negev Bedouin. This geopolitical event and the ensuing Jewish War of Independence caused the escape and expulsion of most of the Arab population of Palestine (The Palestinian *Naqba*). In the Negev region, most of the approximately 11,000 Bedouin who had remained were relocated into an enclave zone administered by the Israeli military, where they stayed until the mid-1960s at which time they gained full citizenship. However, the majority of the lands for which the Bedouin claimed ownership by virtue of their traditional tribal land law (Meir & Marx, 2005) had already been appropriated by the Israel Land Authority under a new land law established in 1958 (Ben David, 2004).

Wishing to gain maximum control over land in the Negev, the State implemented a policy of further uprooting and concentrating the Bedouin into seven semi-suburban multi-tribe towns built by the government between the 1960s and 1980s.

However, more than half of the Bedouin population refused this semi-urban life and remained in tens of unrecognized squatter hamlets and villages. These localities are amongst the most neglected and deprived places in Israel. They have been denied legal statutory status and suffer from a lack of basic infrastructural services such as running water, electricity, sewage, roads and municipal services. Formal public services in the unrecognized villages such as health, welfare and education are also very poor (Svirsky & Hasson, 2005).

In contrast, the seven Bedouin towns built by the State enjoy modern physical and social infrastructure, yet they are still ranked lowest on Israel's socio-economic scale (Abu-Saad & Lithwick, 2000). These towns are characterized by deep poverty, under-development, nepotism/tribalism and inter-tribal tensions. Their neighborhoods are organized along strict tribal-kinship segregating principles, in which bitter and often bloody struggles over public municipal goods occur frequently among the various groups. Consequently, mobility outside their kinship group territory, especially by women, is highly regulated by family and sub-tribal members to accommodate socially-determined customs (Ben-David, 1994).

The limited research that has been done on the subject of place-construction in these semi-urban contexts reveals that the social and spatial complexity of Bedouin towns is manifested by and large in the absence of a clear positive sense of place and place-identity among their residents (Ben-Israel, 2009; Abu Rabia, 2013). In particular, the imposition of urban patterns on multi-tribal blue-collar population has increased social tensions and restricted the evolution of free, open-to-all, urban casual leisure spaces (Fenster, 1999). This urban element, defined in the literature as the *third-place*, is crucial for structuring urban sense of community and sense of place (Oldenburg, 1999).

As a result of cultural changes which the Bedouin have been undergoing in recent decades, they have adopted various components of a Western lifestyle and its cultural attributes while still maintaining many traditional social and cultural structures, institutions and values (Ben David, 2004). The structural changes to their economic base due to accelerated urbanization and proletarization has given rise to dramatic growth in all kinds of consumption, including changes to their diet. This change has taken place alongside a considerable decline in physical activity which previously had been very intensive due to their being pastoralists-tillers (Kedem-Friedrich & Al-Atawneh, 2004). Consequently, new symptoms of Western morbidity have emerged, such as diabetes, overweight and even obesity, high blood pressure and heart disease (Abu-Rabia & Weitzman, 2002; Abu-Rabia, 2010; Abu-Saad et al., 2001; Fraser., 1990; Fraser et al., 2008; Groen et al., 1964). Many adult Bedouin report having been explicitly advised by medical clinic staff to increase their physical activity during their leisure time (Al-A'asam, 2010; Abu el-Qian, 2010; Abu-Rabia, 2010).

Another kind of modern consumption essential to the understanding of the current cultural processes affecting the Bedouin is the fast-growing exposure to the

electronic media (Abu-Bader & Gradus, 2010; Garbia, 2004). The sedentary behavioral pattern of television watching has become one of the most common leisure 'activities'. Furthermore, under the influence of the global media, the bodily beauty ideal has been changing too. The aesthetic of fatness, once highly valued in many Muslim societies, especially concerning women's bodies (Popenoe, 2004), has been challenged by the aesthetic of thinness worshiped in Western culture.

These trends highlight the relevance of studying LPA in general and brisk-walking in particular among the Bedouin, both as a novel cultural practice and as an acute social and health necessity. In the following sections the extent of brisk-walking phenomena is investigated and the forces that socially regulate, constrain and shape it are then portrayed. The main analysis focuses on the willingness and motivation to perform brisk-walking and its local problematic practice under the socio-cultural constraints prevailing within the newly evolved semi-urban Bedouin environment.

## METHODOLOGY

The research focuses on two Bedouin towns – Tel-Sheva (1966) and Hura (1989). The former is the oldest and the latter is the newest among the seven planned Bedouin towns established by the State. The population of each town is approximately 20,000. Both towns are located only few kilometers north-east of Beer-Sheva. The neighboring Jewish Ramot Quarter of Beer Sheva and the suburbs of Meitar and Omer the are located only few driving minutes away (see Figure 1).

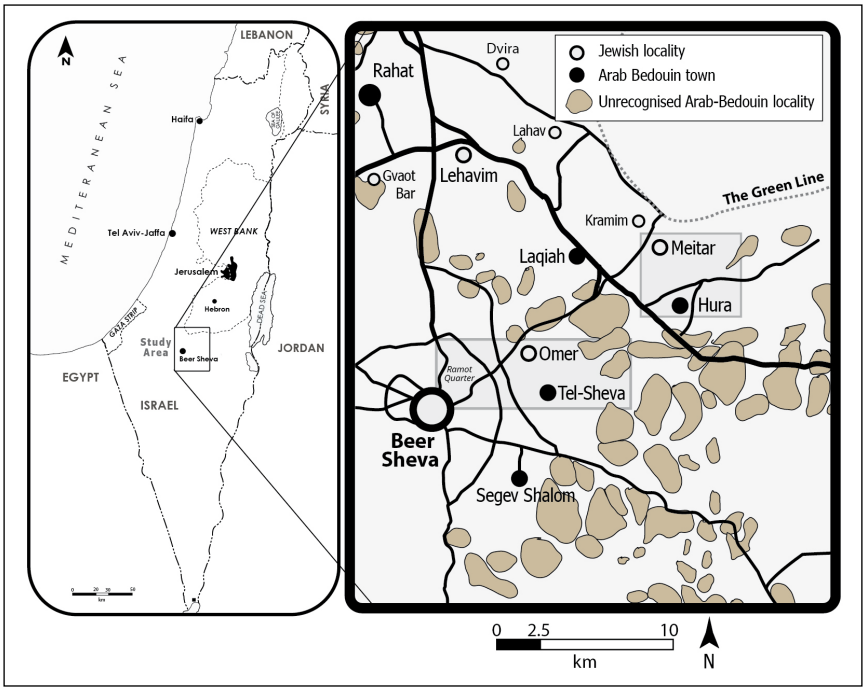
Given that brisk-walkers' experience is at the core of this paper, and since only few dozen are actually exercising brisk-walking, the research questions were approached with qualitative tools. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with twenty participants, including twelve men and eight women who have practiced brisk-walking regularly for two years prior to the fieldwork. Some of these interviews were conducted through participant observation to explore the nature of their experience during and following the walks. Due to the scarcity of brisk-walkers some of the participants were reached via a networking process, relying on the authors' contacts with residents and referrals from municipal sports officials.

Participant ages range from 20 to 50. Male educational background ranged from elementary school experience (n=1), through high-school (n=3), tertiary education as teachers (n=4), to university (n=4). Female educational background ranged from elementary school (n=2), through high-school (n=3), teachers college (n=2), to university (n=1). Interview locations were chosen by the participants: 4 were conducted in the university campus in Beer Sheva, 6 in the local gymnasium, 6 at work places, 4 during outdoor brisk-walking.

The interviews followed the semi-structured procedure (see Avrahami; 2001; Berry, 1999; Patton, 1987), composed of a series of open-ended questions covering the following themes: the background to initiation of brisk-walking; the motiva-

tion versus obstacles on brisk-walking; preferred routes and sites; response of the social environment; and the actual experience of walking. In addition, seven further interviews were conducted with sports professionals and municipal officials of both towns, including local and regional health service staff (n=2), local educational leaders (n=2), municipal leaders (n=2) and local Islamic religious spokesmen (n=1). All interviews were conducted in Hebrew. A translator assisted in interviews with two women not fluent in Hebrew. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 2 hours. In addition, relevant data and information were collected from various local publications related to leisure and sports at the community level. Fieldwork was conducted during 2009-2010.

**Figure 1:** The study area-Tel-Sheva and Hura in metropolitan Beer Sheva




## CONSTRAINTS TO BRISK-WALKING IN HURA AND TEL-SHEVA: WALKING VERSUS TRADITIONAL LEISURE

The stratified society of the Bedouin is circumscribed by strictly defined socio-spatial boundaries, which fragment Bedouin space into sub-tribal spaces. All are highly gendered spaces, in which women are either permitted or forbidden (Ben-

Israel, 2009; Fenster, 1998). Consequently, the space available for all, men and women alike, for brisk-walking is constrained. In order to perform outdoor physical activity, the Bedouin brisk-walker has to overcome deeply rooted norms which restrict behavior in public spaces[2]. Therefore, only a small number of residents actually practice it. Based on estimates by walkers and local officials, 50-100 brisk-walkers practice this activity regularly (twice a week or more) in both locales. The active group represents a considerably lower percentage of brisk-walkers of the total population of Hura and Tel Sheva than the average percentage of brisk-walker found in Israel's overall population.

In the early 2000s, when the first Bedouin brisk-walkers began to exercise in the public sphere, responses by the community were often negative. In most cases, the local milieu expressed disparagement and contempt towards this new 'strange' conduct. The following quotes from walkers' narratives express the negative attitude of the social environment towards early brisk-walkers:

> Those who are over 50, they have the old customs. They say: 'it is not acceptable! It's a shame! And you in this age'… there is a certain age that you ought to sit with the other men. People say: are you insane? (E'[3], male, Hura)
>
> In the beginning responses were not encouraging, people said: are you crazy?! Go and till your land! Go clean your house! I say to them that I walk instead of swallowing pills. That's how I'm persuading them! (M', male, Tel-Sheva).

In addition to the alien nature of brisk-walking as a new and unfamiliar behavior, the reasons for the negative feedback are rooted in the perception that brisk-walking is a non-utilitarian practice, a waste of energy with no tangible benefits. Aside from the common harassing response of passers-by, other spectators reacted in a more positive, although not less disturbing manner. Ongoing offers for a ride by drivers who were acquainted with the walker, a very common and highly cherished gesture in this society (Ben-Israel & Meir, 2010), brought one of the early brisk-walkers in Tel-Sheva to cross the street and walk against the direction the traffic. Later, he tried to distinguish himself from other pedestrians by wearing sport clothes so as to make it clear that he was not a hitchhiker. When this did not work he decided to wake up early and walk before the morning rush-hour. Eventually, he refrained from walking along Tel-Sheva's main streets and rerouted his practice.

Negative external reactions reinforced the walkers' perceptions that this conduct was foreign to their culture and identity. This feeling was articulated for example by M: "*In the beginning it was very frustrating, I felt that I'm doing something I was not raised or educated to do! It's like a fault in our education. Even riding a bike was considered folly"* (M'. male, Hura).

One of the major obstacles is the traditional leisure norms which do not encourage adult LPA. Traditional Bedouin culture has rigorously cultivated a dichotomy between childhood and adulthood (Meir & Ben-David, 1992). Participants indicated that in the past, physical-sport activity was perceived as an immature behavior. Adult men were expected to maintain leisure behavior in a 'dignified' manner, which means among others, in a settled and calm manner. Children were supposed

to perform physical activity by mischievously playing, scampering, running etc. Therefore, novel adult performance of active leisure in public sphere has not yet been accepted, leading eventually to the exclusion of brisk-walking from public open spaces of Bedouin towns.

According to brisk-walkers, one of the most powerful forces preventing higher participation in LPA is a subjective feeling of lack of time for exercise. This problem is common for men and women alike, although in Bedouin patriarchal society the reasons are primarily gender-dependent. 'Feminine' duties include frequent pregnancies, multi-child care, cooking and laundry and other domestic maintenance and duties. To these are added 'masculine' demands of long working hours and endless social obligations common too in this traditional community, such as mutual home visits, sitting daily in the *shig* (men's hospitality tent) and participation in numerous family events. All these were raised by the interviewees as constant heavy demands on time resources and a serious challenge to their wish to maintain their LPA once initiated.

Another fundamental problem is poor LPA-supportive infrastructures in Bedouin towns' public sphere compared to that in neighboring Jewish suburbs. In particular, the walkers noted a lack of street lighting and designated paved trails as well as the generally poor condition of the roads and sidewalk pavement:

> *In my settlement, there is no help for people who want to exercise sports; the settlement does not encourage it. There is only one gymnasium, the road margins are not well maintained, the road isn't tidy, lighting – if I am not doing it during the day… then at night I won't do it...* (K', male, Tel-Sheva).

However, socio-cultural constraints exclude outdoor LPA from the public open spaces of Bedouin towns even when infrastructure is adequate. Solutions were found in alternative spaces, such as in the neighboring Jewish settlements and neighborhoods which have become preferred locationally for Bedouin brisk-walkers, not just due to their superior physical conditions, but also because they offer a culturally neutral space. Part of this explanation is rooted in clothing modesty codes in public space, which are considerably stricter in Bedouin Islamic culture towns than in the Jewish secular suburbs. In Bedouin public spaces, Bedouin men and women are obliged to wear long sleeve clothes, and women must wear a long skirt and *hijab*. Brisk-walking or other outdoor LPA offer no exception. During the long, hot summer days in the desert such norms make outdoor brisk-walking more inconvenient and difficult:

> When you are wearing short pants, you don't feel free to walk within a traditional society. You feel that you are hampering other people's freedom. I don't want anyone to have a problem with it. (A', male, Hura)
>
> What really prevents this is comments and hooting. If I'm walking with short trousers and get into Hura they will do to me a Haq-el-Arab[4]. In order to avoid this I drive to the center of Meitar, and there I walk on the main road to the entrance and back to the commercial center, 4 kilometers in total. (S', male, Hura).

> Hot weather or no hot weather, I have to wear long trousers! Short trousers? Oh no, this is trouble... (M', male, Tel-Sheva).

Aside from modesty norms, walkers prefer Jewish suburban spaces because Bedouin space is highly territorialized along kinship and tribal affiliation lines. Territorialization among the Bedouin, as among many pastoralist groups, has grown tremendously with sedentarization, particularly in towns, enhancing and radicalizing the above-noted behavioral codes (Rapoport, 1983; Meir, 1996). Such spatiality pertains also to some areas outside Bedouin towns where space is in fact divided into tribal-or sub-tribal-controlled areas barred for Bedouin of other tribal affiliations. Crossing kin group territories is possible only for a socially accepted reason, such as a well-intended encounter, economic interaction, social obligation (such as participating in wedding ceremonies, consoling the bereaved, praying in a mosque, etc). Brisk-walking does not fit these criteria:

> *We are accustomed to this since there were tribes and till today in the villages - one who doesn't have something to do there would not dare to enter. To walk around without a good reason? Oh, no, he can't get in there…* (M', male, Tel-Sheva)

Limited mobility due to socio-spatial restrictions is enhanced in periods of heightened inter-group tension and conflicts which are quite common. Two brisk-walkers from Hura, using trails adjacent to town were forced to stop their routine walking within their neighborhood due to a conflict between two related kin groups. This conflict continued to boil over for several months and eventually terminated these walkers' LPA routine. One of them explained the situation by ironically using a well-known cliché from the Jewish national security jargon prevalent in the media: "*Me and K' stopped walking, 'the security situation' does not allow it'… You know what's going on lately in our neighborhood*"... (J'. male, Hura).

## "*I am walking, it is good for me!*" – The motivation to walk

There are forces that push people to initiate and maintain brisk-walking despite the considerable difficulties described above. Brisk-walking is connected to walkers' wish to lose weight and improve their physical appearance. Another major motivation is the belief that brisk-walking is essentially a physical and mental therapeutic tool which can prevent and even help recuperate from illness. Less conventional motivations are the belief by two women that brisk-walking can increase their fertility due to strengthened uterus muscles, and one woman actually felt that brisk-walking fulfilled her expectations in this regard. The supreme importance of reproduction to women's status in Bedouin patriarchal society gives this belief extra socio-cultural significance.

Since mobility of women in the semi-urban Bedouin spaces is extremely constrained (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007) the fact that there are women who actually practice brisk-walking is quite striking. According to the Bedouin socio-cultural code, women represent the kinship group's collective morality, dignity and honor (Tal, 1995; Fenster, 1999), and thus have to ask for permission by their husband

or his male-relative to practice brisk-walking outside kinship space. In addition, they are required to avoid any provocative appearance or conduct during practice. In some cases, violating proper conduct moral codes in public sphere could even endanger their lives.

Thus, brisk-walking by women requires unique social and spatial conditions. The option of brisk-walking in neighboring Jewish suburbs practiced by Bedouin men is not commonly accepted by Bedouin women or their husbands[5]. A negative experience of several Bedouin women trying to brisk-walk on sidewalks of Tel-Sheva led them to self-relocate their exercise from the public sphere into the publicly administered local gymnasium. Encouraged by the local municipal sports coordinator who hired a female Jewish trainer from nearby Beer Sheva specifically for this purpose, a group of ten women started to exercise together twice a week in a brisk-walk class. The rumor spread around in town and soon more women decided to participate and the size of the group doubled. Each session started only after the sports coordinator made sure that all windows were shut, shades were lowered and the main entrance was locked from inside.

Along with health and aesthetic benefits, these women articulated their experience in terms of self-realization. Exercise meant a lot to them; those who managed to maintain brisk-walking for more than several months felt they succeeded in putting themselves first. Brisk-walking was an empowering behavior which had been barred from them in the past:

> *I'm forgetting the obstacles at home. When I return home* [from the brisk-walking class]*, I start my second job full of energy. A lot of children in the house, what can I do? All of the domestic work is women's work. It is a must; I need one hour for myself! Who will care for me? I am walking, it is good for me! The laundry won't run away, also the dishwashing and cooking … this is an hour for myself!* (S', female, Tel-Sheva)

The routine of the brisk-walking class became a significant part of a daily and weekly schedule for the participants. Their ability to put aside domestic obligations as wives and mothers for a pre-determined time span and fulfill their most personal needs as individuals was highly cherished. The monthly tuition paid by each participant was regarded by the Municipality's sports coordinator as means of increasing the women's commitment to the class and their will to keep exercising. The women also highly valued the opportunity for encounter with women from different family origins during brisk-walking classes. Under the segregative conditions of Bedouin society, for the ordinary female residents of Tel-Sheva such a multi-tribal encounter is uncommon and thus carries extra value:

> *It has become a part of our life. It is the everyday of us. Sport is good to the soul and to the body. It is like going to women's club. The connections between the women are very good. We are women from different families* [tribes] *so how else can we get to know each other? We even think about going on a big trip together, yes*! (M', female, Tel-Sheva).

The socially positive atmosphere usually experienced by the participants during brisk-walking class is also an important motivating power. The Jewish woman trainer from Beer-Sheva said that feelings of cohesiveness among the participants and her own warm relationship with them are unique to this Bedouin class compared to other classes she has been running with Jewish women. In this context, all that is 'normal' and self-evident in Beer-Sheva does not appear as such in Tel-Sheva. The exclusive experience of the brisk-walking women class can be explained by a pioneer sense combined with exceptional inter-tribal social interactions.

A unique social experience is also part of men's informal walking experience, especially in cases of walking with a partner[6]. The decision to brisk-walk with a partner or partners has distinct advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantages include the interdependence that evolves between the walkers regarding timing and duration of exercise, choice of routes, pace and more. However, collective brisk-walking has many benefits. Aside from the sense of confidence that collective walking generates, which is highly important especially in Bedouin town-adjacent trails, in most cases collective walking creates a unique social dynamic. A' articulated his brisk-walking experience which he practiced regularly with his cousin:

> *It so happens that things have been opened up and we even shared our secrets with each other. When you are walking you are looking for something to talk about, and it so happens that one talks openly with the other, also on personal matters. And then the other 'owes' him, and that's how dialogues evolve. If we had not walked, these experiences wouldn't have been opened up.* (A', male, Hura).

The conversations among walkers who exercise together over a significant period of time have qualities that are distinct from conversations that develop in other social encounters. Participants indicated that various topics are discussed during brisk-walking, some of which are so sensitive that they can be brought up only in this kind of face-to-face, intimate and active interaction, free from any interference, and away from the noisy, crowded town and socially demanding Bedouin culture:

> *In the tribal areas, there is no special place for walking, everyone stops you – How are you? Ahalan! We have decided that we need to look for another place for walking, where nobody will bother us. So we chose a grove, a special place, no interferences… it has strengthened our relationship, we talk freely about a lot of things, about work and family, about life… in the end of the walk, we sit and drink tea or coffee. Each of us has a coffee-kit in the car, and we talk, and then I am relieved, I feel the day has gone well.* (M', male, Tel-Sheva)

The potential of brisk-walking to stimulate a unique social atmosphere and intimate conversations among walkers has been demonstrated here in relation to cases of collective walking. Somewhat surprisingly, similar 'dialogical tracks' have also been created during cases of solo-walking:

> *More than once a new idea is born, and then I write it down on a piece of paper. Sometimes I walk alone in Ramot* [in the Jewish city of Beer-Sheva]. *While walking I'm listening to music and I'm running a dialogue with myself about life. It is a kind of self-examination. This solitariness is a very significant feeling for me.* (M', male, Hura).

### *Brisk-walking and construction of place*

The issue of place is of special interest in the analysis of brisk-walking in Bedouin semi-urban space. Spatial perspectives, including the more sensual-emotional 'sense of place', reflect people's experienced mobility with regards to knowledge, emotions and practices (Hannam et al., 2006). With some caution, several insights may be noted about the relationship between this fairly new and rather tense LPA activity and the construction of the Bedouin 'semi-urban place'. The group of women who lock themselves inside the gymnasium for a walking class, or the men who walk in the open fields or on the sidewalks of the neighboring suburb, are all expanding the legitimate social space of action and experience. This expanded social space gives the walkers a new comparative perspective, leading them to perceive their own towns as underdeveloped, closed and conservative:

> I was used to jogging in Ramle and since I moved to Hura I have stopped... It is inconceivable and will evoke malicious thoughts ... Now my husband has to buy me a treadmill. I want to plant tall, tall, green trees all year so that the neighbors do not look into the yard and criticize my behavior... (R', female, Hura).

Social surveillance and control, conceived by this walker as communal criticism of her preferred life style, lead to her desire to physically withdraw from the town, and reflect a negative sense of place in Hura.

A second consequence of this newly acquired comparative perspective is the increased awareness of the inequalities that exist in the level of infrastructure provided for different communities. In this case, feelings of underdevelopment and discrimination, directed both at Bedouin society internally and externally to state institutions, add a negative dimension to sense of place: *"So I get into Meitar and walk and I become jealous, this town cares about the people who do sports*" (K', male, Tel Sheva).

An interesting experience is shared by those who walk to open spaces outside of the town. In some of the walks which were based on participant observation, the experience of encountering nature aroused longing for childhood and intensified the sense of loss of local knowledge as a result of settling in town:

> When I walk outside I feel connected to the open space, connected to nature. And I'm less connected to the town and to the fact that this man has a land lot here, and that man has a land lot there, and here there is Neighborhood 10 and there is Neighborhood 9 and all this territoriality… For me that thing is in the genes. If an entrepreneur comes to make a walking or riding route, I believe that this route will be lively. It should be in an open area that does not belong to anyone. When you walk in this area, it gives you an idea of how densely populated the town is, and there are many more negative sides (A', male, Hura).

Similar feelings were expressed by another walker:

> For me walking is something bountiful that I like, it's part of my daily schedule, no doubt that I like it! These walks have connected me to nature, so I

> bought a Jeep! Now I have another option to travel in nature… (M', male, Hura)

Re-routing LPA from town to the open natural field regenerates sense of place constructed through nature-culture relationships lost during first Bedouin encounter with urbanity.

A positive social dynamic is created through new forms of time-space experienced by walkers. Based on an understanding of place as an accumulation of meanings and significance in time and space (Cresswell, 1996; Massey, 1994) the Bedouin brisk-walkers' production of this alternative space can be interpreted as a practice of producing place. From the perspective of time, brisk-walking is a distinctive and delineated behavior in time, a kind of pause from a demanding daily schedule, a pause that is dedicated to the walker's self-realization. Self-realization is obtained by the interlacing of the following universal elements: increasing physical fitness, improving bodily shape, gaining mental focus and experiencing social interactions and sense of capability. From a spatial perspective, brisk-walking takes place within or via routes which are culturally distinctive and delineated spaces. Indoor gymnasiums, out-of-town spaces (such as open fields or parks) and the neighboring Jewish suburban parks, streets and sidewalks are all alternative spaces immune from Bedouin social criticism. In fact, by using these neighborhoods the Bedouin are importing spaces into their town space. It is only within these spaces that the culturally imported behavior is socially accepted since the visibility of walking is limited and therefore does not threaten the social-public order. It is there that visibility in walking, so deeply embedded in modern-Western urbanity (Brighenti, 2010), does not constitute an obstacle to the Bedouin. In these 'protected' spaces and 'borrowed' spaces, a unique social atmosphere is created that enables a distinctive personal or inter-personal communication to evolve during exercise. These include a wide-range of topics, from conventional social chatting, to discussion of professional issues, to confidential, highly personal matters. While such topics seem reasonable and characteristic of any group's experience, they have an extra meaning in the semi-urban Bedouin contexts. These qualities are characteristic of what is known as "third-place": a space which is open to everyone without strict social roles of hospitality, encourages small talk, creates an atmosphere of togetherness, contributes to the expansion of social networking and creates a sense of place (Oldenburg, 1999).

## A MOBILE 'THIRD-PLACE': DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although brisk-walking has been commonly analyzed in terms of physical health benefits, Bedouin brisk-walking is read here primarily through a socio-cultural lens. The main insight of the research is that as brisk-walking rituals become established, their social and psychological benefits become more prominent in the participants' narratives than those of physical health which were the initial motives for the activ-

ity. Given the socio-spatial conditions of Bedouin public space, brisk-walking is not a self-evident practice. Because of its lack of legitimacy, there are no 'conventional' spaces for this exercise such as those in Western localities, and therefore Bedouin walkers are compelled to find alternative spaces for this practice. Observing these elements allows us to propose a definition for Bedouin walking spaces as a mobile third-place. This is the space that is not home or work space; yet it is a significant urban space which offers an open daily meeting space and encourages good-natured discourse while walking. Since a multi-tribal third-place open to all is not available in the public space of the town, it is in fact produced by the walkers in their various walks at several extra-town spaces and trails. By walking the third-place, the Bedouin bypass norms and restrictions that prevent them from doing what they deem important.

But there is also another level of movement to consider: the 'cultural movement' (Kisch, 2009), experienced by each walker when s/he moves back and forth from the daily sphere to the alternative spaces of LPA. For the individual Bedouin, who is part of an ethnic minority in a multi-ethnic social space, getting out of the extended family territory usually means crossing cultural boundaries, whether entering other Bedouin group's territories or a Jewish social space.

Although approaching different cultural spaces within an uneven frame of power relations is known as having a complex effect on identity matters (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Hetherington, 1998), it is a skill worth developing for many Bedouin individuals. For women, whose mobility is limited and participation in the Israeli labor market is close to nil, the interaction with people outside their own immediate familial social circle is most significant. The process of crossing cultural boundaries for women is simultaneously difficult and meaningful (Abu-Saad et al., 2007; Abu-Rabia Queder & Karplus, 2013)[7].

In this sense, one may refer to Karrholm et.al.'s (2017) concept of walking identities within walking assemblages that are produced relationally within given situations. One might go from a more privileged and uncontested position of a walker to pursue a certain daily function, say shopping, to that of an unwelcome brisk walker desperately trying to pursue his/her exercise in the public sphere or elsewhere. In each of these performances one's identity changes accordingly allowing the full range of walking sorts within the assemblage.

This quality among others, may explain the good atmosphere and spirits that characterized the entire fieldwork during which the interviewees were all happy to share their experiences. Accordingly, positive feelings were part of participant walking methodology. Most walkers perceive themselves as cultural pioneers and believe that the trend of brisk-walking in Bedouin society will grow in the future.

Several issues remain for further research. First, as outlined, are the links between brisk-walking and the construction of place and sense of place. Among the different meanings that underlie the notion of sense of place, an outdoor experience of urbanized Bedouin has hardly been explored in the literature. Given a problematical

construction of sense of place of this marginalized indigenous-ethnic minority in the planned Bedouin towns (Ben-Israel, 2009), the potential influence of outdoor leisure-time brisk-walking in reconstructing the links with varied environments is an important issue for further research.

The second issue is the role of gender in shaping overall spatiality of Bedouin brisk-walking. There is need to add and refine the gender similarities and differences regarding the needs, constraints and patterns of using urban and non-urban space in order to deepen the understanding of the challenges facing each of the social groups.

The final question concerns the maturing urbanity in Bedouin society. Hura and Tel Sheva have different urban histories, which might be reflected in different attitudes to brisk-walking. The research revealed that in the specific context of outdoor LPA, the free and unconstrained walking and walkability (Hutabarat, 2009), that in Western culture have become major components of contemporary urbanity, is not acceptable to either community, causing their brisk-walkers to avoid their own spaces and cross cultural borders. Further research on additional Bedouin towns, perhaps including Rahat, the largest one (pop. ~62,000) would shed more light on this issue. It would be particularly interesting to examine the new 'Rahat-South' neighborhood which represents a new Bedouin urban model of tribally-mixed neighborhoods. The question still remains whether third-place and particularly mobile third-place, through brisk-walking and other forms, is a proper criterion to appreciate urbanity among the Bedouin as a distinct ethnic group. Answers to these questions, anchored in the research described in this article, can establish better theoretical understanding of the role of ethnicity and socio-economic and gender gaps in shaping urban walkability and mobility, as well as the nature of the evolving urbanity among the Bedouin that is significant from an urban planning perspective among such a unique ethnic minority.

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## NOTES

1. Recently, gaps have begun to narrow as more gyms have opened that accommodate cultural unique requirements. Yet, this contemporary growth characterizes especially the economic elite of the orthodox religious groups (Paz & Almog, 2009).

2. As a social construct, the meaning of the term 'public space' differs according to time, space and culture. It is commonly accepted to portray an abstract spectrum of public space in which its typical poles are the "open-modern-Western" vis-à-vis the "traditional-non-Western". Any point along this spectrum represents a set of values and norms as well as technologies, ideologies and social relations, which regulate people's behavior and performance and their accessibility to the public sphere, according to social dissimilarities like age, sex or status etc. These sets are the phenomenon's collective cultural boundaries only within which individual distinctiveness and creativity can be attended (Fraser 1990; Zukin, 1995; Atkinson, 2003; Göle, 2002).
3. In order to protect participant anonymity we use first initials.
4. In Bedouin customary law Haq-el-Arab is a trial procedure. Public performance of Bedouin with short trousers is liable of violating the modesty and honor codes of the wider kin group.
5. However one of the authors of this article has encountered himself several occasions of small groups of 2-3 Bedouin women (never in single) practicing brisk-walking in dark-hours (perhaps the best time from their desired non-visibility perspective) in one of these Jewish suburbs.
6. For a Bedouin male walker, the only legitimate option is a male partner. A female partner, even one's wife, is obviously inconceivable.
7. Relevant to this is the positive impression and encouraging response that Jewish passers-by usually express towards the Bedouin groups walking through the neighboring Jewish suburbs. However, as our field data suggests, alongside many cases of encouragement, a single case of exclusion was reported. The incident was reported by a group of Bedouin walkers during a period of security unrest in Meitar who were asked by the local security team to leave.

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